

Activities and Discussion Questions



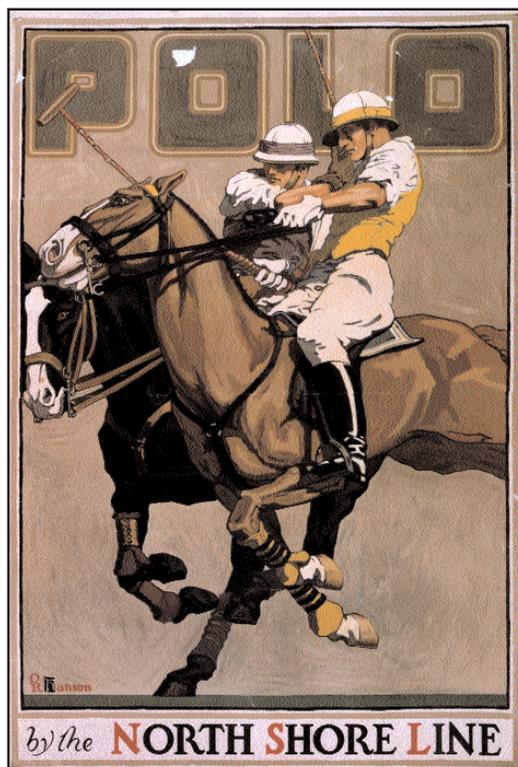
Inning 2

2.1 A Class Act?

Americans have never been comfortable talking about class. Ours is supposed to be a society in which accomplishment matters more than ancestry.

We have always liked to think that there's no limit to where education, hard work, talent, and a little luck can take us. And there are plenty of examples to back up that belief.

But could it also be true that class distinctions are sharper than we might like to admit?

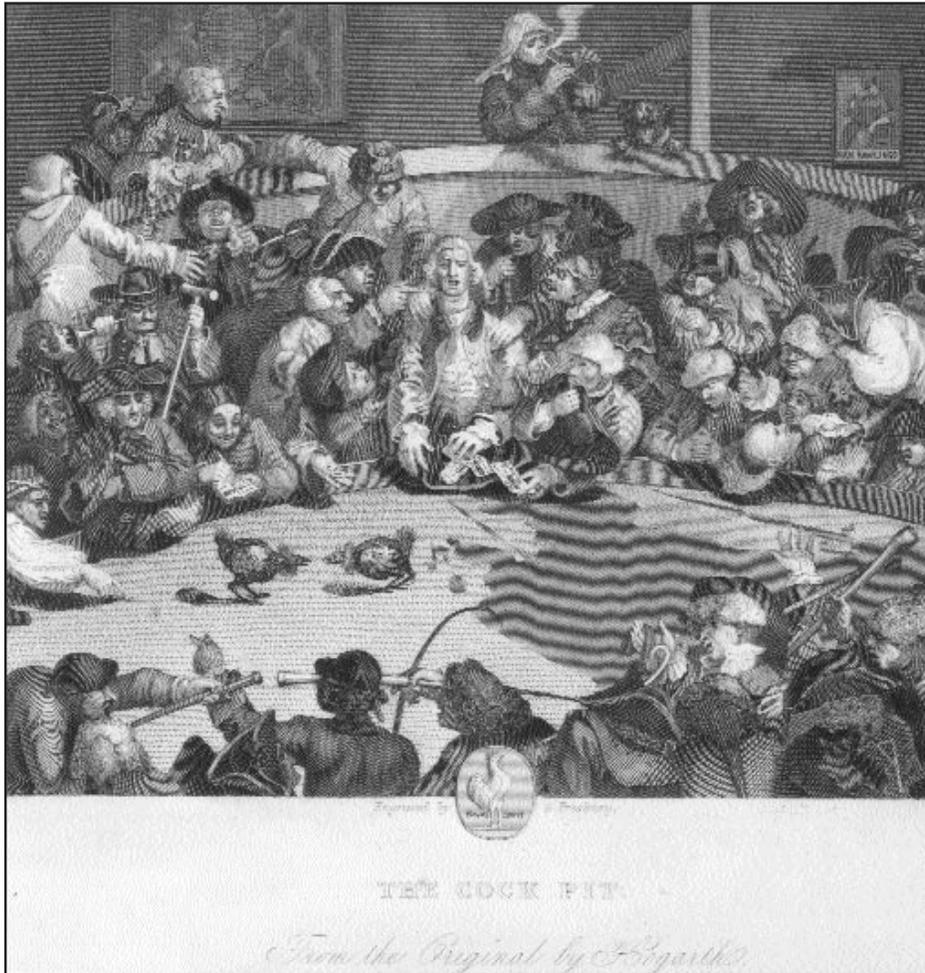


Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress

Polo. An advertising poster for the North Shore & Milwaukee Railroad



Inning 2



Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress

Cockfighting, 1700s

Part A

Try This Exercise:

List all the sports you can think of. If you don't feel like starting from scratch, some of the Internet search engines have pretty good lists.





Inning 2

When you finish making the list, try to classify each sport according to which socio-economic group you think it would appeal to the most:

- working-class spectators or participants
- middle-class spectators or participants
- upper-income spectators or participants

Question:

What are some of the reasons that influenced your classifications?

Part B

Try This Exercise:

Depending on the season, watch at least 30 minutes of a golf match, a tennis match, NASCAR, whatever major team sport is in season, and professional wrestling. Keep a log of the commercials for each telecast.

Questions:

- What differences do you notice in the products and services being advertised?
- What do the differences tell you about class distinctions?





2.2 Things Change

In 1954, social scientist Jacques Barzun claimed that, “Whoever wants to know the heart and mind of America had better learn baseball.”

But that was then. What about now? Does baseball still have anything to tell us about the “heart and mind of America”? Are there other sports that now tell us more? Which ones? And what does the rising popularity of those sports tell us about the economic and social changes that have occurred over the past 50 years?

Try This Exercise

Compare the two photos on the next page. One shows the crowd at Boston’s Fenway Park, circa 1934. The other shows fans at Fenway during the 1990s. What are the differences between the two? What do the differences say about changes in the U.S. economy?





Inning 2



Fenway Fans, 1930s

Photograph by Leslie Jones, Courtesy of the Boston Public Library, Print Department



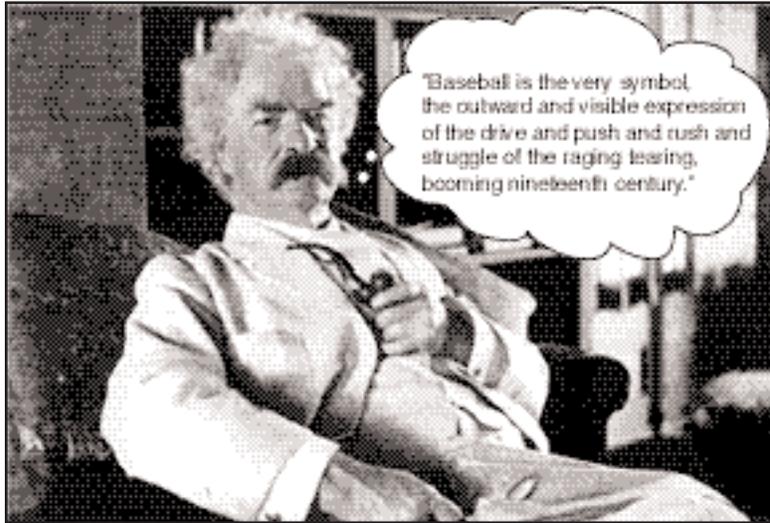
Fenway Fans, 1990s

Courtesy of Boston Red Sox



2.3 Design A Sport for the Times

In 1889, Mark Twain said that baseball was “the very symbol, the outward and visible expression of the drive and push and rush and struggle of the raging, tearing, booming nineteenth century.”



Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress

Mark Twain

But what about the twenty-first century? If you were to choose or invent a sport that expresses our current economic and social realities, what kind of sport would it be? Why?





2.4 Planes, Trains, and Parking Spaces

Try This Exercise:

Compare the two photos. One shows Boston's Fenway Park, which opened in 1912. The other shows Los Angeles's Dodger Stadium, which opened in 1962. What does the comparison tell you about how the market for pro sports was affected by transportation improvements and demographic changes. (If you're stumped, just start by describing what you see.)

Question:

What about planes? How did air travel help to expand and change the market for pro sports?





Inning 2



Courtesy of the Boston Public Library, Print Department

Boston's Fenway Park, 1945



Courtesy of the Los Angeles Dodgers

Dodger Stadium, Los Angeles



2.5 Bringing the Game Home: Sports and the Media

During the late 1800s and early 1900s, trolley cars and subways expanded the market for professional sports by making it possible for more fans to visit the ballpark. Automobiles did the same during the 1950s and 1960s.

But the modern pro sports bonanza could never have happened without the mass media. Newspapers, radio, and television gave teams and advertisers a way to tap the interest – and the pocketbooks – of all those fans who rarely, if ever, had the chance to see a game in person.



Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress

Newspaper sports sections gave more fans a way to follow their favorite teams and players.

Sports and the media first teamed-up during the late 1800s when newspapers introduced "sporting pages" as a way to fill more space and sell more advertising. (An increasing literacy rate and a steep drop in the price of newsprint had helped to boost U.S. daily newspaper circulation from 2.6 million in 1870 to 15.1 million in 1900.)

Sports sections proved to be a very effective way to connect with a mass audience. People who were not able to sit in the stands every day could still follow their favorite teams and players by reading the newspaper. And from a business standpoint, the sports section was a great way for advertisers to connect with readers – especially male readers.

When radio came along during the 1920s, the sports market expanded again. Announcers brought the games – and commercial advertisements – into the cars and living rooms of even more fans.





Inning 2

But the real bonanza began during the 1950s when television showed viewers what the games actually looked like. Once that happened, the connection between sports and armchair fans became stronger than ever. Kids were able to observe and mimic the mannerisms of their favorite players. And before long, the kids and their parents, were opening their wallets even wider to buy the products that their heroes were plugging on the small screen.

Cable television took the media/sports relationship to a new level during the late 1970s and 1980s. ESPN, the all-sports cable outlet, enjoyed spectacular success, and later so did Fox Sports.

In some ways, the cable TV boom had an impact that was similar to the increase in newspaper circulation a hundred years earlier. Newspaper editors had created sports sections because they needed more content to fill their pages, and because they saw the commercial possibilities in sports. A hundred years later, cable TV executives did much the same thing. They



Courtesy of National Baseball Hall of Fame

Photographers on the field.





Inning 2

needed content to fill all those time slots, and they had a hunch that cable would be an ideal way to reach a TV audience that was becoming more segmented. Cable extended the sports market to a younger, less traditional audience with innovations such as extreme sports and beach volleyball.

Sure, some hard core traditional fans think a lot of the new programming borders on "junk sports." But, hey, one fan's "junk sports" is another fan's source of excitement and entertainment.

Try This Exercise:

Look at a recent newspaper and compare the ads in the sports section to the ads in other sections. Is the sports section still mainly a vehicle for advertisers to reach male readers? Explain your answer.

Try This Exercise:

Bring in the weekly television listings from a Sunday newspaper. Go through it and write down all the sports programming you can find. Note the type of sport, the time of day, the channel/network, and whether or not the event is on cable or broadcast television. Then try to analyze how the expanded number of available television channels has affected the content of sports programming and the market for televised sports.

Question:

What about computers? Are they helping to expand the market for pro sports, or are they competing against sports in the entertainment/leisure market? Explain. (See Exercise 1.6 All Net)

